

REPORT

OF

A COMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA,

*On the subject of the encouragement of the cultivation of tropical plants
in Florida by grants of public lands.*

JANUARY 29, 1846.

Referred to the Committee on Agriculture, and ordered to be printed.

LEGISLATURE OF THE TERRITORY OF FLORIDA.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Session of 1845.

Mr. LORING, from the Committee on the state of the Territory, made the following report:

The committee to whom was referred a resolution instructing them to "inquire into the expediency of memorializing Congress in favor of giving encouragement to settlers on the unsurveyed lands of the United States in the southern section of the peninsula, and on the keys, who will engage in the cultivation of tropical plants and fruits, and in the making of arrow-root, and other products peculiar to that region," beg leave to

REPORT:

That the adaptation of the chief part of such of the peninsula of Florida, and some of the islands and keys lying south of $26\frac{1}{2}$ degrees of north latitude, for the successful cultivation of most of the tropical productions enumerated in the schedule annexed to this report, has been tested by actual experiments since 1829. That extensive plantations, worked by a slave force, cannot be established with profit in that part of Florida, within the limits designated, every one acquainted with it must concede. The lands, excepting small narrow strips of hammock on the margins of the water courses, generally insufficient for an ordinary cotton or sugar or rice plantation, are a light sandy alluvial, with vegetable deposit on limestone rock, which is but a short distance below the surface, and often found on it so as to obstruct the cultivation. On the borders of the water-courses, and adjacent to those for short distances, the timber is often luxuriant in growth and of various kinds, and the undergrowth is exceedingly thick, while in the interior there is rarely to be seen any thing but ponds in wet seasons, which are prairies in dry, surrounded by fine forests. These lands will

not repay to the government the expense of surveys. In fact, they will never average five cents per acre. The best and most select portions, mostly in small tracts not exceeding 160 acres, will not sell for more than the present legal *minimum* price of \$1 25 per acre, demanded by the United States. If the general government shall render encouragement to persons to settle on these lands and engage in the cultivation upon them of tropical productions, the principal portion of all of them, fit for cultivation, would be densely settled in a few years; but without such encouragement they will not be, for a quarter of a century to come. Those who would settle upon them for such object, are mostly such as would be unable to pay for the lands to the government. They would be generally poor men, supporting their families by their labor, whose chief motive for such settlement would be the desire of establishing a permanent home. To induce the cultivation of tropical products, the land must be owned by the persons engaging in the cultivation of them. The rearing of an orange or lime grove, or an olive grove, and indeed the cultivation of most of the tropical productions, is a permanent improvement, taking several years to result in profit to those who undertake such cultivation. A slave force could not be employed profitably in such business. If the United States would bestow 160 acres of land upon every person who would permanently settle on any lands south of $26\frac{1}{2}$ degs. of latitude, reside upon such lands for five years, and actually cultivate at least 20 acres in tropical productions, under proper regulations to be prescribed by law, the benefit resulting to the United States would be vastly greater than the paltry pittance of \$200 exacted in the purchase of such quarter section from the settler. Again, these lands have yet to be surveyed and brought into market; and with the uncertainty in regard to the pre-emption laws, few will be found disposed to settle on them, and make any improvements, without some guarantee from government that such improvements will not be wrested from them hereafter by speculators. The importance of having a permanent, steady white population attached to the soil in the section designated, must be admitted by every intelligent man who looks at the geographical position of that section. Without such population, in time of war it would be the *point d'appui* of a foreign enemy; once in possession of the enemy, it would afford great advantages to them in the annoyance of our coastwise commerce, and in making predatory incursions into the adjacent country. The importance of encouraging the cultivation of the kind of agricultural products referred to we cannot conceive any one will dispute. The United States pay to the West Indies, to South America, to the Azores, to Portugal, and other tropical countries, a large amount annually for such products. South Florida is the only part of the United States in which these products can be raised. With the exception of the articles of coffee, tobacco, sugar, tea, and black pepper, it is believed, with proper encouragement, an amount equal to the entire amount imported into the United States would be raised in the country included in the limits we have indicated, in a few years.

Vessels trading to Florida would not be subject to the onerous exactions in foreign ports, and the close proximity of the peninsula to New Orleans would enable that market, and the entire valley of the Mississippi, to be supplied with greater facility, and at a *less* cost than from Cuba or elsewhere; and the Atlantic ports could be furnished with *equal* facility and expense as from the West Indies. The existence of such a state of things will decrease our dependance on foreign countries—a new source of employ-

ment for our domestic industry will be created. That the government of the United States will afford such encouragement as has been intimated, if proper efforts are made to disseminate information on the subject, we do not doubt. The past liberal legislation of Congress on this subject is a guarantee that it will not neglect its duty, if its attention is properly directed to it. In 1832, the executive of this territory directed the notice of the legislative council to it, in a message, an extract from which is appended hereto. At the same session of the council, an act was passed entitled "An act to incorporate the Tropical Plant Company of Florida," approved January 23, 1832, which is to be found on page 2 of the laws of that year. The application made to Congress, by those who formed the company, was recommended by the legislative council; and in 1838 Congress passed an act, to be found in vol. 9 Laws U. S., page 869, entitled "An act to encourage the introduction and promote the cultivation of tropical plants in the United States." The committee deem it useful to copy that act entire in this report. It is in these words:

"Whereas, in obedience to the treasury circular of the sixth of September, 1827, Dr. Henry Perrine, late American consul at Campeachy, has distinguished himself by his persevering exertions to introduce tropical plants into the United States; and whereas he has demonstrated the existence of a tropical climate in southern Florida, and has shown the consequent certainty of the intermediate domestication of tropical plants in tropical Florida, and the great probability of their gradual acclimation throughout all our southern and southwestern States, especially of such profitable plants as propagate themselves on the poorest soils; and whereas, if the enterprise should be successful it will render valuable our hitherto worthless soils by covering them with a dense population of small cultivators and family manufacturers, and will thus promote the peace, prosperity, and permanency of the Union: therefore—

"[SEC. 1.] *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,* That a township of land is hereby granted to Dr. Henry Perrine and his associates, in the southern extremity of the peninsula of East Florida, to be located in one body of six miles square, upon any portion of the public lands below twenty six degrees north latitude.

"SEC. 2. *And be it further enacted,* That the said tract of land shall be located within two years from this date by said Henry Perrine, and shall be surveyed under his direction by the surveyor of Florida: *Provided,* That it shall not embrace any land having sufficient quantities of naval timber to be reserved to the United States, nor any sites for maritime ports or cities.

"SEC. 3. *And be it further enacted,* That whenever any section of land in said tract shall be really occupied by a bona fide settler, actually engaged in the propagation or cultivation of valuable tropical plants, and upon proof thereof being made to the Commissioner of the General Land Office, a patent shall issue to the said Henry Perrine and his associates.

"SEC. 4. *And be it further enacted,* That every section of land in the tract aforesaid, which shall not be occupied by an actual settler positively engaged in the propagation or cultivation of useful tropical plants within eight years from the location of said tract, or when the adjacent territory shall be surveyed and offered for sale, shall be forfeited to the United States.

"Approved July 7th, 1838."

All the encouragement that could be desired would be a general act containing similar provisions, with also those before suggested for the benefit of all settlers in the designated region. A gratuity of a quarter section to each one engaging in such cultivation would be sufficient. Provision should be made for the survey of the locations, without reference to the sectional lines now observed in the United States surveys. The benefits of the act of Congress above quoted have been lost to Florida by the death of Dr. Perrine, who was murdered at Indian Key, in 1840, by the Indians. Previous to his death, he had embarked his whole fortune in this undertaking. His family providentially escaped the massacre, but with the loss of their entire property, and applied to Congress not to enforce the forfeiture contained in the act, which had been incurred in consequence of Dr. Perrine's death. Florida, for whom Dr. Perrine made great sacrifices, whose patriotic efforts, had he lived, would have resulted so much to her benefit, seconded that application. Congress has extended the grant to his heirs, and it should give similar grants to others. The committee cannot close this report without adverting to a subject to which their attention has been attracted by reading the proviso of the second section of the act of Congress above quoted. The policy pursued in regard to the public lands in Florida has been exceedingly unwise and short-sighted. The Spanish government before the cession, and the British government when it owned the Floridas, encouraged the building of saw-mills by giving large tracts of public lands adjacent to those who established them. The United States seize all timber cut on the public lands as forfeited. The most valuable lands for cultivation are kept from sale under the pretext of having "naval timber" on them—which, if the fact, is not a sufficient reason for such a course. Some half a dozen persons, at extravagant salaries, are employed to watch the timber and keep every body from stealing it, which they can easily do notwithstanding, when it is worth stealing. It would be much wiser to dispose of the lands, and have them occupied by industrious agriculturists, who can defend the country without the timber better than the timber can defend the country without them.

The committee have not deemed it expedient to make a dissertation upon the several different products specified in the schedule annexed, and the cultivation of which should be encouraged. They do not profess to be competent to write an agricultural essay. One of the resolutions reported for the consideration of the House is to procure authentic data as to these different products. The article of arrow-root being specially mentioned in the resolution of inquiry addressed to the committee, they deem it proper to make a few observations respecting it. The facility of raising the compty, from which this article is manufactured in South Florida, should occasion the exclusion of all arrow-root from foreign countries. The arrow-root produced from the compty is equally as nutritious as the arrow-root of Jamaica or Bermuda. It can be made at a profit, if it brings 10 cents at the place of exportation. Within the last year, at least 25,000 pounds have been made in South Florida for shipment; millions of pounds could be annually made in South Florida, and more than enough for the demand on this continent; and, indeed, larger quantities could be sent to Europe;—all that is wanting is labor, *and land owned by the laborer*. The compty is indigenous to the whole peninsula. We do not ask for encouragement by a protective impost. Every part of the south should disdain any participation in the system of unconstitutional plunder by the means of protective

tariffs. We should scorn such deception and iniquitous system of unequal taxation, by which, if persisted in, the Union will become a burden instead of a blessing. The encouragement and protection we seek is fair, open, and aboveboard. If this is not granted, we want no other. With these suggestions, the committee recommend the adoption of the following resolution.

WILLIAM W. LORING,
JAMES H. RANDOLPH,
H. H. PHILIPS,
F. E. DE LA RUA,
JNO. P. BALDWIN,

Committee on the state of the Territory.

Resolved, That the governor of Florida be requested to address the Secretary of State of the United States and solicit instructions to the different United States consuls in tropical countries, and to the officers of the navy visiting tropical countries, to procure such information relative to the practicability of raising in Florida different tropical exotics as may be sought by the governor of Florida, or the commissioners named in this resolution; and that such consuls and officers be requested to procure and transmit to Florida such seeds, roots, and plants, and products, as may be introduced and cultivated here, with such information as to their cultivation as may be useful; and that the governor of Florida be requested to make inquiries to procure such information; and that S. S. Sibley, esq., editor of the *Floridian*, and J. Clisby, esq., editor of the *Sentinel*, Tallahassee, be also requested to act as commissioners to collect, in like manner, authentic data on these subjects, and have the same published for the information of the public, and laid before the next legislature of Florida, so as to bring the subject advantageously before Congress.

Which was received, read, the resolution unanimously adopted, and, on motion of Mr. Hart, 500 copies of the report, resolution, and documents ordered to be printed.

Schedule of products to be raised.

Compt, yam, casava, ginger, pulka, Sisal hemp, indigo, tobacco, cortex cascarilla, canilla alba, sarsaparilla, sugar cane, pepper, bush and vine pepper, pimento, tea plant, orange, guava, Otahite plum, shaddock, lime, hog plum, forbidden fruit, lemon, Jamaica apple, grape fruit, citron, sugar apple, banana, pineapple, cocoanut, plantain, sapadilla, sour sop, Avocado pear, mango, mame, olive, mame sapota, boxwood, lignumvitæ, mahogany, titi, and ship timber.

Extract from acting governor Westcott's message, 1832.

"In May last, the governor received a communication from Commodore Elliott, commanding naval officer on the West India station, stating that Lieutenant Commandant Boerum, of the United States schooner *Shark*, had,

on a visit to the island of Trinidad, procured from Sir Charles Smith, governor thereof, several varieties of the sugar cane; a box containing one of which, the Congo, was deposited with a gentleman in Pensacola, subject to the governor's order, with a view of promoting the objects of a resolution of the House of Representatives of the United States, January 25, 1830, respecting the procurement of 'such varieties of the sugar cane, and other cultivated vegetables, grains, seeds, and shrubs, as may be best adapted to the soil and climate of the United States;' which resolution had been transmitted to Commodore Elliott by the Secretary of the Navy. The governor adopted measures forthwith to have the cane disposed of in the most advantageous manner, to meet the objects of its importation. The resolution of Congress alluded to was introduced by the Delegate from this Territory, and, if carried fully into execution, it is calculated ultimately to produce, and particularly with regard to us, highly important and beneficial results. Hundreds of the vegetable productions of tropical climates, of great value, and some in such common use as to be considered articles of necessity, and which we now import at high cost, could be easily cultivated in any part of our Territory. Many too tropical to flourish in west or middle Florida, could be reared under the more genial climate of the southern part of the peninsula. The southern part of this continent, and South America, and China, abound in trees, plants, herbs, and roots, possessing the most valuable properties, the use of which has been confined to the places of their production, but which could as well be produced and enjoyed by our own citizens. I herewith transmit to the council, and respectfully invite their attention to, an extract of an official letter from H. Perrine, United States consul for Campeachy, to the Secretary of the Treasury, in relation to this subject, which has been published in the newspapers, and from which I have taken it. Other documents, worthy of attention, are also herewith sent to the council. It will be noticed that Mr. Perrine is desirous that an act of the council should be passed incorporating himself and his associates into a company for the cultivation of tropical exotics, and he proposes to establish the plantation of the company on the southern part of the peninsula. This enterprise should not be classed with the inflated visionary projects of which Florida has been so prolific, and the failure of which has created so much distrust of all novel undertakings. If those who embark in it should not find it a source of gain, and should, after trial, abandon it, the benefits resulting to the country from the introduction of the many valuable foreign products they will have brought among us must be of considerable importance, and should induce us to render every encouragement and aid in our power to promote the success of the undertaking; and, although Mr. Perrine has made no direct application, I earnestly recommend the granting of a charter as he wishes, and the bestowment upon the company of as many privileges as is compatible with the public interests. The national legislature, it is to be hoped, will afford aid to so laudable an enterprise, and one which, if successful, promises to be of national benefit, by a grant of land sufficient for their use, or otherwise. I esteem it, however, of paramount consequence that an interest should be excited among the agriculturists throughout the Territory in relation to the introduction and adoption of foreign products. The tea plant, those trees and plants from which are procured the olive, ginger, pepper, cloves, cinnamon, pimento, nutmeg and cocoa, and many other articles of daily use in our families, could, it is believed, with care and attention, be successfully cultivated in

most parts of our Territory. But the practicability of every article mentioned being readily produced by those planters favorably located, as it regards climate, cannot be questioned. The production of these articles, if only sufficient for our own domestic consumption, would be of immense advantage to our citizens; and, if experience should prove that Florida might, in a few years, be looked to by our fellow-citizens of the States for such products, the benefits resulting to the Territory would be incalculable. If, as has been conjectured by some, we shall, before many years, have more formidable competition in the raising of cotton from Mexico, South America, the East Indies, from Egypt, and from the extensive countries bordering on the Black sea, opened to the trade of Europe by the canon of the allies at Navarino, it is wise for the cotton planter to prepare for the adoption of other articles for cultivation; and, in respect to those that require any considerable length of time to bring them to maturity, he should not delay. Whether the cultivation of the cane, and the manufacture of sugar, can be relied upon as a certain source of profit to the Florida planter, and especially if the present duties on imported sugar are reduced by Congress, is by many regarded as problematical; but, conceding these doubts to be unfounded, admitting the conjectures stated in regard to cotton to be idle speculations, and if the experiment fails immediately to yield the planter pecuniary profit, the arguments of convenience, of independence, and of patriotism, are still in favor of the adoption and culture of every useful exotic congenial to our soil and climate that we can procure. The general government have offered, by the resolution above mentioned, great facilities for their introduction; but, for the more effectual accomplishment of this object, I suggest that a small appropriation be placed at the disposal of the executive to meet the expenses of transportation and other charges necessarily incident to the procurement of seeds, &c.; and that you authorize, by resolution, such as may be received to be distributed, for propagation, under his direction."

